

# Awareness and Attitudes of Undergraduate Students towards Plagiarism: Are There any Differences between Genders?

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**Abstract:** Plagiarism has become more prevalent in higher learning institutions. Tertiary students have the tendency to commit plagiarism as a quick solution for completing their assignments, or they may unintentionally commit it because they lack awareness towards it. Curbing plagiarism amongst tertiary students is important to maintain academic integrity. Thus, the study aimed to investigate whether there were any differences between genders on awareness and attitudes towards plagiarism amongst tertiary students. The study employed a quantitative method by using a set of questionnaires as the instrument to gather the data which was distributed via the class WhatsApp groups. The sample consisted of 50 undergraduate students from Universiti Teknologi MARA Cawangan Negeri Sembilan, Kampus Seremban, Malaysia, who were obtained through purposive sampling. The data collected were analysed by using the Statistical Packages for Social Sciences (SPSS). The results of the independent t-test demonstrated that there were no significant differences between genders on awareness and attitudes towards plagiarism. The results were also consistent when the Mann Whitney U tests were conducted. Therefore, the results suggest that being aware of plagiarism and attitudes towards plagiarism cannot be associated with gender. Consequently, higher learning institutions should educate all students regardless of gender to prevent plagiarism from occurring.

**Keywords:** Awareness, Attitudes, Plagiarism, Gender, Higher Learning Institutions

## 1. Introduction

Plagiarism is regarded as a serious offence as it has the impact on academic integrity. Plagiarism in academic writing amongst students is prevalent at the tertiary level of education. This may be due to the nature of courses offered which require them to submit written assignments that may lead them to extract other people's work easily especially from numerous online resources without acknowledgements. Any misconduct related to plagiarism amongst students should not be tolerated as serious penalties are implemented if they are found guilty. For example, Universiti Teknologi MARA has imposed the regulation that students who plagiarise will fail their course. Furthermore, it is

important to instil the right attitudes towards plagiarism as to ensure that they will possess academic integrity and practise it after they have completed their studies.

Plagiarism amongst students at the tertiary level is not really a new issue. With the advancement in information communications and technology (ICT), plagiarism can be easily committed as materials can be accessed digitally and available online (Awasthi, 2019). As a result, ideas and work can simply be copied and pasted easily without proper acknowledgement.

Plagiarism can be curbed if awareness and attitudes towards plagiarism are improved. However, there are many challenges in integrating any element of plagiarism in the classroom such as large number of students in a classroom and limited time to cover syllabus (Hairuzilaet al., 2009). As a matter of fact, a course syllabus at the tertiary level is commonly too lengthy to be covered within one semester which comprises of 14 weeks.

Integrating important skills such as paraphrasing, summarising and synthesizing and citing to avoid plagiarism requires a thorough planning and preparation. Hence, the large number of students and enormous number of skills to be covered are the challenges to incorporate elements of plagiarism in teaching have limited the chance to create awareness of plagiarism among the students. However, skills such as paraphrasing and summarising are essential in terms of not copying ideas fully as published. Paraphrasing is useful in terms of rewriting ideas such as definitions and facts in a different way, but the meaning of the ideas is the same (Cheong et al., 2017). Whereas, summarising is required when ideas are compressed by omitting less important points from a long text such as examples (Cheong et al., 2017). Those two main skills are significantly important to be integrated in class in order to reduce plagiarism.

Research on plagiarism demonstrated that students did not have adequate knowledge about plagiarism (Lim & Huh, 2019; Mohammadkarimi & Amin, 2019). Students' knowledge about plagiarism affects their attitude towards it (Lim & Huh, 2019). Hence, knowledge about plagiarism is essential to increase their awareness towards plagiarism that may likely lead them in having positive attitudes towards plagiarism. Meanwhile, prior studies demonstrated that attitudes towards plagiarism affect the intention to commit the act of plagiarism (Kattan et al., 2017; Farooq & Sultana, 2021).

Since plagiarism is a crucial issue at the tertiary level of education, it requires exceptional attention for understanding the issue. Moreover, it is associated with gender. According to Bokosmaty et al. (2017), findings from research suggest that males plagiarise more than females. Therefore, this paper aimed to investigate the awareness and attitudes of undergraduate students towards plagiarism in terms of gender differences.

## **2. Literature Review**

According to the online Oxford English Dictionary (2021), the term plagiarism is defined as 'the practice of taking someone else's work or ideas and passing them off as one's own'. Various definitions of plagiarism are provided by scholars. Zheng (2021) simply defines plagiarism as using ideas or work from others without acknowledging them appropriately. Ragavi and Yamuna Devi (2019) describe plagiarism as using someone's ideas, methods, results, work or words without providing the original author and source. Mohamed et al. (2018) explains that plagiarism is the act of someone using another person's idea with no acknowledgment and attribution, he or she claims it belongs to him or her. Thus, it is important to note that plagiarism is committed when appropriate acknowledgements are not provided when using ideas or work from others. In academic writing, particularly, proper citations and references must be included when using ideas or work from others in order to avoid plagiarism.

Research on gender differences in awareness towards plagiarism is limited, but there is a substantial number of research on gender differences in attitudes towards plagiarism.

Jereb et al. (2018) empirically proved that there were significant gender differences in awareness towards plagiarism in terms of gender. They identified three types of students in terms of degree of awareness towards plagiarism that include (1) being aware but considering the act of plagiarism as right and ethical, (2) being aware of plagiarism, and (3) being aware of plagiarism but are still plagiarising although they know it is unethical.

There is evidence that male students might engage in plagiarism and cheating more than female students do (Farook & Sultana, 2021; Bretag et al., 2019). However, Tindal and Curtis (2020) revealed that gender was unable to predict subjective norms when it comes to plagiarism as they noted the rise

in the proportion of female population in their samples over time. In contrast, Jereb et al. (2018) found gender differences were significant in attitudes towards plagiarism as female students displayed more negative attitudes towards plagiarism than male students. Dagan et al. (2017) discovered that male students had higher tendencies to commit plagiarism compared to female students. The finding was obtained when they conducted a study on candidate teachers in Turkey. Dagan et al. (2017) believe that it happened due to the Turkish culture that Turkish men are traditionally raised with the provision of more freedom.

Jereb et al. (2018) found gender differences on attitudes towards plagiarism were statistically significant. They proved that female students displayed more negative attitudes towards plagiarism than male students. However, a study on Iraqi EFL college students by Bairmani et al., (2021) demonstrated a contradicting finding. They revealed that there was no significant difference among male and female students in their awareness of plagiarism. Similarly, in terms of behaviour, Pagaddu (2021) demonstrated that both genders commit the act on a similar level but for different reasons. Jereb et al. (2018) discovered significant findings with other factors other than gender that drove plagiarism such as socialisation, efficiency gain, motivation for study, methodological uncertainties or easy access to electronic information via the Internet and new technologies. Gender as one of the measures of socio-demographic factors, can also explain a significant amount of variance over and above students' perceptions and students' personal factors (Tremayne & Curtis, 2020).

Although research on plagiarism has indicated that males may have a greater predisposition toward plagiarism than women, Bokosmaty et al. (2017) claim that evidence from research is inadequate to justify those claims. They found students' attitudes range from permissive to severe depending upon a range of factors related to plagiarism. The factors found were whether it is using one's own work or the work of another, whether punishment is likely and severe, and whether others also engaged in such unethical practice.

Pagaddu's (2021) study on gender differences in the act of plagiarism reveals that the majority of respondents (90%) believed that males plagiarised more than females. Pagaddu justifies the finding by providing several reasons. One of the reasons for this, based on prior studies, is that it is assumed that males are more likely to plagiarise compared to females due to the reason that male students have high educational goals. Bravery in committing the act of plagiarism is another reason why males are better at it than females (Whitley et al., 1999 as cited in Pagaddu, 2021). In terms of morality, Pagaddu (2021) claims that females are considered to be good household models and therefore will put their conscience and emotions before committing plagiarism. This is confirmed with his finding that indicated eight out of 15 respondents who considered plagiarism as being sinful were females.

Pagaddu (2021) further claims that procrastination is also another reason for the difference in plagiarism act between males and females. While males tend to procrastinate more and indulge in last minute submission of assignments, females on the other hand tend to keep to deadlines and thus are likely to plagiarise less than males.

Idiegbeyan-ose et al., (2016) conducted a study on awareness of plagiarism among postgraduate students in selected universities in Nigeria and responses from 175 males against 148 females were recorded. The results revealed that 12.4% of males reported a low level of plagiarism awareness while shockingly no females reported this. This indicates that females are more aware of committing plagiarism than males.

In another dimension, the element of spiritual development in education should also not be ignored (Zabidi et al., 2020). It is due to morality is a key aspect of the spiritual needs of a human being. Lecturers need to show good examples to their students through the implementation of ethical values in teaching. Having a clear teaching philosophy that embeds good moral values will also contribute towards curbing the act of plagiarism among students.

As such, awareness and attitudes towards plagiarism are two crucial factors that are crucial to impact students in having the intention to plagiarise or commit it. Therefore, deep understanding is required to help curb the problem.

### **3. Methodology**

A set of questionnaires was distributed to 50 students (19 males and 31 females) aged between 20 to 26 years old from Universiti Teknologi MARA Cawangan Negeri Sembilan, Kampus Seremban who enrolled in English for Academic Writing, the English writing course which are compulsory for degree students. All the items in the questionnaires were closed-ended questions which were divided into three parts: Part A (the demographic profile), B (awareness of plagiarism) and C (attitudes towards plagiarism). The items in Part B and C used five-point Likert scales from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The data for awareness of plagiarism and attitudes towards plagiarism were the summation scores of the items in the sections. The analyses were performed by using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences software.

Numerous statistical methods are based on the presumption that the data follows a normal distribution or also known as a Gaussian distribution where it is assumed that the population from which the samples taken are normally distributed. Therefore, the normality of the data in this study were estimated by using two methods: (1) visual method and (2) statistical tests.

For the visual method, quantile-quantile plots (Q-Q plot) were used to check the normality of the data visually. The Q-Q plot can plot the quantiles of a variable's distribution against test distribution. A normally distributed data shows a straight diagonal line  $y=x$ .

For the statistical tests, the Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk tests were conducted to assess the normality of the data for this study. The Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk tests are among the popular options for assessing the data normality. The tests compare the sample's scores to a normally distributed set of scores with the same mean and standard deviation. The null hypothesis is that the sample distribution is normal. The significant results indicate a non-normal distribution (Ghasemi & Zahediasl, 2012).

There are two methods of statistical inference which depend on the probability of the distribution which are parametric and non-parametric. If the normality of the distribution can be defined, the parametric test is applied to compare the differences between two independent samples (male and female). The suitable test in the parametric group is the independent t-test. A crucial assumption of the independent t-test is the variances of two groups are equal or homogeneity of variances. In SPSS, the independent t-test comes together with the Levene's test if the option for equality of variances is chosen. The insignificant results indicate a homogeneous variance. The significant results in the Levene's test (equal variances not assumed) can be proceeded by using a modified t-test or often referred as the Welch t- test.

If the normality of the distribution cannot be defined, the equivalent non-parametric Mann-Whitney test will be used. In contrast with the parametric method that compares the means between groups, the non-parametric method analyses the medians of the variables. However, if the sample size contains more than 30 respondents ( $n>30$ ), the assumption of normality can be violated (Pallant, 2016).

Since this study had 50 respondents, it was decided that both, parametric and non-parametric methods, were used to analyse the data. It is due to the reason to see any discrepancies in terms of results obtained from the analyses. Using both, parametric and non-parametric methods, to analyse the same data is common as reported in some literature (Dziedzic et al., 2017; Graham, 2008).

The null hypothesis in both parametric and non-parametric approaches is that there is no difference between males and females in awareness of plagiarism and attitudes towards plagiarism. The contradict statement supports the alternative hypothesis.

4. Results

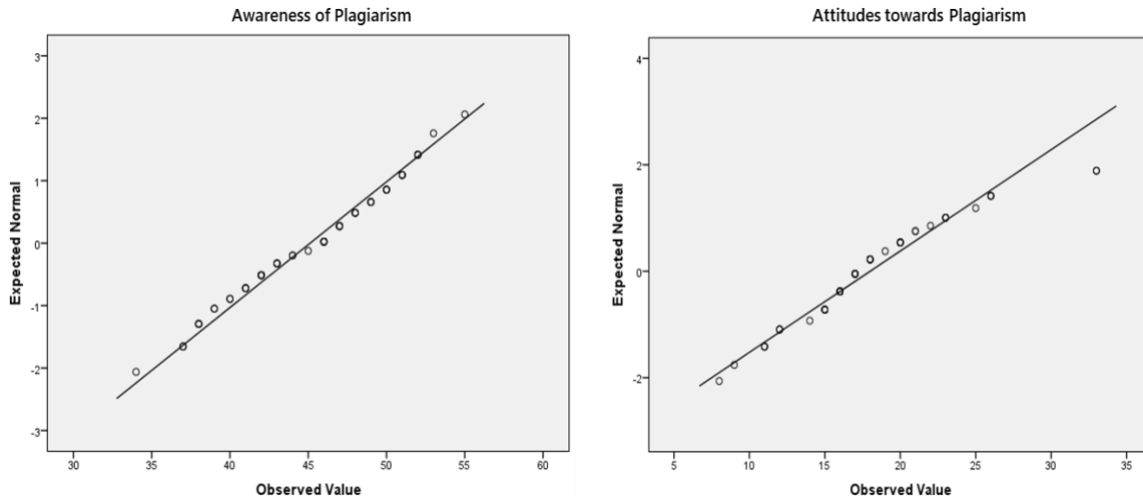


Fig. 1 Normal Q-Q Plot

Based on Figure 1, the existing points always follow and approach the diagonal line for Awareness of Plagiarism but seems not true for Attitudes towards Plagiarism. There is a possibility that the Awareness of Plagiarism is normally distributed and Attitudes towards Plagiarism is not normally distributed. It is confirmed with the results from the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test. Even though some researchers argue the Shapiro-Wilk test is inferior for the small sample, it is still reported in this paper for consistency checking. A Kolmogorov-Smirnov test in Table 1 indicates that the Awareness of Plagiarism  $D(50)=0.110$ ,  $p>0.05$  do follow a normal distribution but not valid for Attitudes towards Plagiarism  $D(50)=0.140$ ,  $p<0.05$ . The results from the Shapiro-Wilk test are consistent with the previous results, the normal Q-Q plots and the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test.

Table 1. Test of Normality

	Kolmogorov-Smirnov Statistic	Shapiro-Wilk		
		Sig.	Statistic	Sig.
Awareness of Plagiarism	.110	.177	.977	.436
Attitudes towards Plagiarism	.140	.016	.945	.022

The descriptive statistics as shown in Table 2 provide basic information about the gender comparisons. The mean for Awareness of Plagiarism is 44.895 and 45.258 for males and females respectively. Meanwhile, the mean for the Attitudes towards Plagiarism is 18.947 for males and 17.419 for females. The difference in means of males and females is not too far from one another for both variables. It may lead to a conclusion that there is no difference between gender for Awareness of Plagiarism and Attitudes towards Plagiarism among students.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics by Gender

	Male		Female	
	M	SD	M	SD
Awareness of Plagiarism	44.8947	5.80129	45.2581	4.47934
Attitudes towards Plagiarism	18.9474	7.23014	17.4194	3.57560

However, the descriptive statistic only describes a sample in the study without trying to make inference about population properties. Whereas inferential statistics make inferences about the population from the sample. Therefore, the analysis proceeded with the independent t-test and Mann-

Whitney tests. This paper employed both parametric and non-parametric methods for all variables. Since some researchers stick to the rule of thumb of sample sizes less than 30, the normality assumption can be violated, while some follow the results from statistical tests.

The variance was homogeneous as assessed by the Levene's Test for Awareness of Plagiarism ( $F=3.669, p=0.061$ ). Therefore, the independent t-test was run on the data with a 95% confidence interval (CI) for the mean difference for both variables, and the results are indicated in Table 3. It demonstrates that there was no significant difference between gender for Awareness of Plagiarism ( $t(48)=-0.249, p=0.805$ ). However, the equal variance was not assumed by the Levene's test for Attitudes towards Plagiarism ( $F=8.188, p=.006$ ). The independent (Welch) t-test shows an insignificant difference between Attitudes towards Plagiarism with gender at a 5 percent significance level ( $t(48)=-.998, p=0.323$ ).

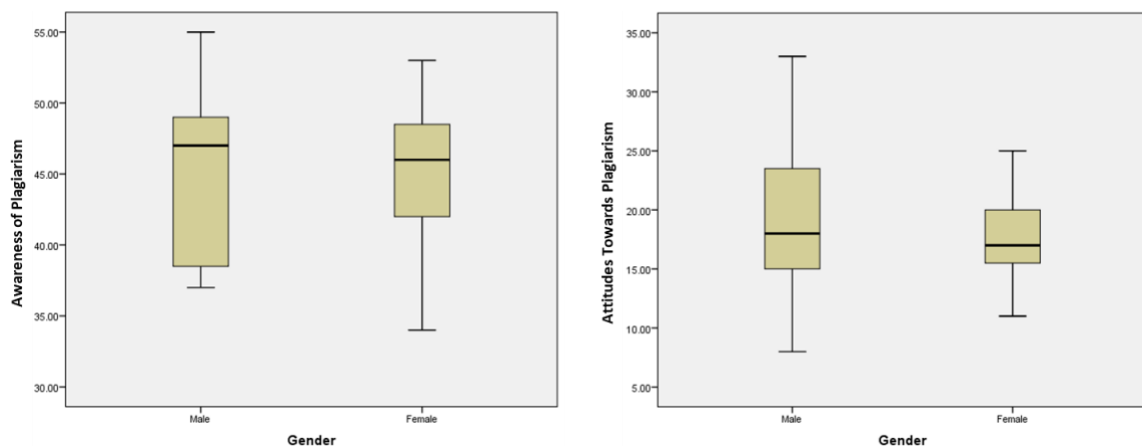
**Table 3.** Independent Samples t-Test

	T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Awareness of Plagiarism	-.249	48	.805
Attitudes towards Plagiarism	.998	48	.323

Table 4 shows the mean rank of the gender. The female group has the highest mean rank for the Awareness of Plagiarism. While the male group has the highest mean rank for the Attitudes towards Plagiarism. However, there is only a slight difference in the mean rank of males and females. The box plot in Figure 2 displays a close median for both variables for males and females. It reveals that there were no significant gender differences for Awareness of Plagiarism and Attitudes Towards Plagiarism as indicated by the Mann-Whitney U test in Table 5.

**Table 4.** Mean Rank

Variable	Gender	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
Awareness of Plagiarism	Male	24.97	474.50
	Female	25.82	800.50
Attitudes towards Plagiarism	Male	27.16	516.00
	Female	24.48	759.00



**Fig. 2** Box Plot Graph

**Table 5.** Mann Whitney U Test

	Awareness of Plagiarism	Attitudes towards Plagiarism
Mann-Whitney U	284.500	263.000
Wilcoxon W	474.500	759.000
Z	-.200	-.632
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.841	.527

## 5. Discussion and Conclusion

The objective of this study was to investigate the awareness and attitudes of undergraduate students towards plagiarism in terms of gender differences. Descriptive statistics using means suggest that there are no gender differences in awareness of plagiarism (male:  $M=44.895$ ,  $SD=5.801$ ; female:  $M=45.258$ ,  $SD=4.479$ ) and attitudes towards plagiarism (male:  $M=18.947$ ,  $SD=7.230$ ; female:  $M=17.419$ ,  $SD=3.576$ ) among students. The findings are strengthened by the Mann-Whitney U and Wilcoxon W tests which revealed that there were no significant gender differences in awareness of plagiarism ( $p=.841$ ) and attitudes towards plagiarism ( $p=.527$ ). The results are not consistent with the findings from Jereb et al. (2018) that demonstrated significant gender differences in both awareness and attitudes towards plagiarism.

There are many factors that can influence students to plagiarise such as socialisation, efficiency gain, motivation for study, methodological uncertainties or easy access to electronic information via the Internet and new technologies (Jereb et al., 2018). Moreover, the cultural background also plays a role in committing plagiarism (Dagasan et al., 2017). Therefore, future studies should consider various other factors than awareness and attitudes towards plagiarism in understanding which gender is more prone to plagiarise. As the advancement in educational technology has enabled automated tools in checking plagiarism such as Turnitin, Original and iThenticate, studies should also be conducted on whether gender differences on acceptance of technology affect the act of plagiarism.

In terms of sample, it was obtained through convenience sampling. Hence, it is not possible to generalize the results and interpretation to other students outside of Universiti Teknologi MARA as the survey was done in a single institution-based study with a relatively small number of undergraduate students taking an academic writing course. Therefore, the researchers are cautious about generalizing these results to students from other faculties. To obtain a more comprehensive assessment of the awareness and attitudes on plagiarism among undergraduate students, the same survey tool can be administered to a larger number of samples, in the same university or branch campus.

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